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The Clipper Visits...

Sandy Earle

DR&HS Executive Director Retiring

By GREY PERRY



Sandy Earle

After 8 years of solid accomplishment in carrying out the purposes of the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society, Alexandra Earle will retire her position of executive director at the end of October this year.

"It has been immensely rewarding to help steer the Society, and I have appreciated the opportunity to increase my own knowledge of Duxbury's past and to share this learning with others in the community and around the world. It's been exciting and fun," she says.

The Society's purposes today are to "preserve and

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provide public access to its lands and buildings; to provide educational programs to the community; to collect, preserve, and exhibit artifacts and records relating to Duxbury history; to provide a library and archives for the encouragement of scholarly research and to publish documents of historical interest." Coordinating all of these activities from her office in the Drew House at the end of Washington St. at the flagpole has been a full-time effort by Sandy. She has a part-time assistant and caretakers for the properties, but she stresses the importance of the many volunteers who are responsible for the success of the programs offered throughout the year, particularly the docents, or volunteer guides who regularly staff the 2 major properties open to the public during the summer, the King Caesar House and the Captain Gershom Bradford House. In addition to being the office of the Society, the Drew House is open all year and contains the society's library and has a small gift and book shop.

"We could not function without our volunteers," says Sandy. "We have about 30 hostesses/docents who give tours at our historic houses, and that number swells to over 100 who help during the big events like Christmas at the King Caesar House. Volunteers do everything: cataloging, research, writing books, caring for the collections, helping visitors, clerical work, decorating, publicity, planning programs and social events. Volunteers maintain the open space and provide recreational trails through the forests, and others care for the buildings and gardens. These volunteers are absolutely essential to the Society."

Sandy is especially proud of the extent of involvement with the community the Society has enjoyed over the last 8 years. "We have about 700 members, most of whom are local residents, and we would like to see many more. There are 2 persistent rumors regarding membership: that one must live in an

antique house, and also that one must be invited to become a member; neither one is true. While that was once the case, it definitely is not the case today. We are a community organization and everyone is welcome."

Originally founded as a Rural Society in 1883, its purpose was "to improve and ornament the streets of the town." An early project led to the purchase of land at Round Pond in 1891 for conservation, the beginning of a conservation movement which has led over time to the Society's acquisition of more than 150 acres of open space.

In 1916, the Drew House was bought by a Drew descendant and given to the Society to become the Historical Rooms, and in 1936, the Society's name was changed to become the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society, with its dual role of preserving the historical and natural resources of the town of Duxbury, and encouraging an awareness and appreciation of the town's heritage and rural character.

In the 1960s, there was an active period of interest in the Society, and during that decade, the King Caesar House and the Captain Gershom House was acquired, as well as Cedarfield on Clark's Island, the site of the annual picnic.

Programs

"If there is anything I would like to achieve as I leave, it is to pass on to young members something of what I received from my predecessors, who nurtured and built the Society during its important years of growth in the 60s and 70s," Sandy says, referring to the encouragement and enthusiasm she received from Dorothy Wentworth, the former Town Historian, and from Sabina Crosby, the former Society secretary. Among the many educational programs offered by the Society are tours of historic sites for 2nd graders, and tours of the King Caesar House and architectural walking tours for 5th graders, programs planned with the cooperation of the schools and integrated into the curriculum. The Society offers 2 annual awards, one to an 8th grade student who has excelled in Social Studies and good citizenship; the other is a college scholarship for a graduating senior, recently a \$1,000 stipend.

Sandy comments, "I have much satisfaction in the quality of programs we have been able to present. Leaders in the worlds of history, decorative arts, preservation and the natural environment have come to Duxbury and enjoyed enthusiastic responses from our audiences. John Demos, Jack Larkin, Nancy Rexford, Robert Olson, Stephen Small, Charles Sullivan, and Peter Gomes are among the nationally known names. At the same time we have provided a forum for local scholars.

Fall Programs

The Sarah Wingate Taylor estate has been important to the Society in enabling it to present a regular series of

lectures in the spring and fall. On Sept. 24, the stewardship manager for the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities will speak at the First Parish Church; and on Oct. 8, Elizabeth Meyer of the International Yacht Restoration School will present a slide lecture titled "Trials and Triumphs in Yacht Restoration," covering the restoration of the racing J-boats of the 1930s, *Endeavor* and *Shamrock V*, as well as the future restoration of the 1885 schooner *Coronet*.

The docents just returned from a day trip to the Martin House Farm in Swansea, which increased their knowledge of another historical site. Other similar trips have included Deerfield, Newport, Newburyport, Portsmouth, Salem, Sandwich, and of course Plymouth.

Publications

Publications are another important program of the Society. "We have been able to produce high quality books, which bring us all new awareness about Duxbury's past," comments Sandy. "In the past year, we have published *A Proud & Fiery Spirit*, by Helen M. Hill. This is the journals of Captain Edward Baker, who was Mrs. Hill's grandfather. The journals center on his boyhood in North Duxbury, and give a lively account of Duxbury life in the mid-19th century. In addition, Sandy says there are plans for new publications including a guidebook for Duxbury visitors and newcomers.

Records and Research

"We have a curator and an active Library Committee," says Sandy. "Cataloguing of the collections and organization of records is ongoing. The Date Board Committee works with homeowners to help them date their houses, and we have a Research Committee working on an oral history project, interviewing and taping people who remember Duxbury's past."

Special Events

"Our own special events, including the Clark's Island Picnic at Cedarfield and the King Caesar House Christmas, have opened our resources to the community," says Sandy, "and we have had 2 auctions to raise funds for the Society, which have involved many Duxbury citizens. This year, we will have the annual Fall Foliage Fiesta, guided walks for all levels of walkers or hikers on Oct. 20.

"The Clark's Island Picnic is a high point of summer in Duxbury. Everyone is welcome to come to the island and it is great fund for all ages. Cedarfield, which was the home of Sarah Wingate Taylor, has strong Pilgrim ties. Miss Wingate deeded her property to the society along with the endowment for educational programs 'in

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the principles and precepts of our Pilgrim ancestors.' At the picnic, the Pilgrims are remembered at a short commemorative service held at Election Rock. This year, the Rev. Michael Marrone of Duxbury's St. John's Church officiated. In the past, we have had visits from some Pilgrims from the Plantation, who sail over in the shallop, mingle with guests, organize Pilgrim sport for all ages, offer a prayer, and present a muster for everyone's enjoyment. They couldn't come this year, but we hope they will return in the future. Clark's island is a very special place and the Society is happy to be able to share this day with the community.

"The unofficial beginning of the holiday season occurs when we open the King Caesar House, with all the rooms decorated for a traditional 19th century Christmas, with greens, fruits, flowers and ribbons, as well as period clothing from the Society's collection. The theme last year was 'A Currier and Ives Christmas,' and the house looked absolutely enchanting. There is a candlelight holiday party for the Society's members, and then the house is open for several days for visitors. There is a holiday boutique with antiques and crafts provided by local merchants and artisans. There are refreshments, and last year, we had hay rides for children. This is our biggest event of the year and it seems to get more spectacular each year!," says Sandy.

Lands

Sandy also says, "The Lapham Woods across from Town Hall, and the walking trails at Round Pond that are part of the town's greenbelt, were developed by the Society jointly with the Conservation Commission and the Audubon Society. The Bluefish River area, now a rose garden and park, and the Bumpus Park across from the King Caesar House, as well as many small lots all over town, are among the Society's holdings and projects. Dorothy Wentworth was fond of saying that the town today owes much of the way it looks to the Rural Society and she was right."

Reflections

Sandy's stewardship of the DR&HS has been a productive one. Maintenance of the Society's properties, comprising of 9 buildings and over 150 acres of open space, from woodland to marshes and beaches and gardens, is an important part of its work.

Sandy says, "I am pleased to leave it all in as good shape, or better, than it was when I began. For me personally, the most rewarding project was the renovation of the Coot Cottage, working closely with craftsman Jon Daley to bring the project to fruition."

Sandy is profuse in her praise for the volunteers,

"Volunteers and cooperation within the community are the core of the Society. There is no way to thank everyone who has shared their time and talents and expertise to help the Society grow and who have made my job a pleasure; the members, especially the committees and others who volunteer; also the Duxbury town officials, the press, and other organizations and the business community. They have all be wonderfully supportive of the Society -- and of me. Most of all, I will miss these people."